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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ROME 000865

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SUBJECT: ITALY BEGINS CENSUS OF ROMA CAMPS

REF: A. ROME 681  
[1](#)B. 05/23/08 EMBASSY ROME DAILY REPORT  
[1](#)C. 11/02/07 EMBASSY ROME DAILY REPORT

ROME 00000865 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: A/Pol M/C Gabriel Escobar, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (C) With a large majority in both houses of parliament and a public united in feelings of insecurity in large cities, PM Berlusconi's government has begun to crack down on illegal immigration and crime. A plan to conduct a census of residents of encampments, aimed at Italy's Roma population, responds to widespread public sentiments that lawlessness and crime in the camps has gone unchecked. Police have begun to conduct surveys of camps in Naples and Milan, and will start soon in Rome. Initial plans to fingerprint all residents have been scaled back, and implementation has been uneven and disorganized. Some Italian NGOs and EU bodies have voiced concern over what they consider ethnic discrimination.

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Security: A Winning Campaign Issue  
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[1](#)2. (C/NF) PM Berlusconi's government has made fighting the perception of insecurity a priority in its first months in office (ref A). The center-right majority considers security a bread-and-butter issue to which its base responds. Security issues were a deciding factor in last April's elections, which saw the ascendancy of the Northern League, Berlusconi's populist and sometimes anti-immigrant partner in government. Italians from across the political spectrum have voiced support for the government's recent initiatives on security issues and illegal immigration by wide margins, from increasing penalties for drunk drivers to faster expulsions of foreigners convicted of crimes (ref B).

¶3. (C/NF) Italy's relatively small Roma population (estimated at 150,000) is made up of roughly three segments: Roma with long-rooted historical ties to Italy, most of whom are Italian citizens; Roma who have arrived in the last 40 years, mainly from the former Yugoslavia; and Romanian Roma who have immigrated relatively recently, and in significant numbers since Romania's accession to the EU on January 1, 2007. The recent influx of Romanians, and particularly Roma from Romania, has fueled feelings by many Italians that the state lacks control of its borders and tolerates illegality. The brutal murder late last year of an Italian woman by a Roma man of Romanian origin sparked national outrage and marked the beginning of more intense scrutiny of this group (ref C).

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Government Issues Orders on Encampments  
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¶4. (C/NF) As a response to the perceptions of illegality emanating from Roma encampments, the government issued three orders May 30 that declared a state of emergency to deal with what the press has called Italy's "'nomad crisis.'" The orders delegate special powers to the prefects of Milan, Rome and Naples and authorize them to conduct a census of both authorized and illegal encampments. While the orders speak only of "'encampments'" in a general sense, the measure is aimed at Italy's Roma population. Poloff spoke with MoI Diplomatic Adviser Marco Villani, who said a census of residents of encampments will allow the government to reestablish legality and protections for residents living on the margins of society, and will permit the state to ensure that living conditions meet minimum standards. The orders authorize the collection of biometric data as part of the census, and also call for the Italian Red Cross to accompany the National Police during visits to camps. The orders ultimately foresee the expulsion of individuals identified in the census who lack the legal right to reside in Italy.

¶5. (U) In testimony before the Constitutional Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Deputies on June 25, Interior Minister Robert Maroni (Northern League) elaborated on the census plan, and explained that police would collect fingerprints of all camp residents, including children, to satisfy the requirement for biometric data. The news that Roma children would be fingerprinted generated considerable criticism, particularly from the center left and the Catholic Church, which continues to exercise significant influence on political debate in Italy. Famiglia Cristiana, Italy's largest circulation weekly, denounced the plan as "'a violation of human dignity,'" and questioned why the government did not devote its energy to fighting "'true criminality in vast areas of the country.'"

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Prefects Begin Census Implementation  
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¶6. (C) Implementation of the census plan has varied, as each prefect retains substantial discretion about how to proceed. Census data collection began in Naples on July 4, where four camps of largely Serb-national Roma are located. According to the Community of Sant'Egidio, a lay Catholic NGO, the initial forms used to collect personal data included fields for religion and ethnicity, which is prohibited under Italian and EU law. The MoI says it has revised the data collection sheets to remove the inadmissible fields. Naples police have opted not to fingerprint children under age 14.

¶7. (U) In Rome, census data collection has not yet begun, and will commence on July 15 at the earliest. Rome prefect Carlo Mosca has said police will ask camp residents for identification documents, and that the law already authorizes identification of undocumented individuals by other means, including through fingerprinting. Rome Mayor Gianni Alemanno announced July 8 that no children would be fingerprinted. In Rome, the census data will be used to provide camp residents with an ID card that can be used to obtain health care and access to schools.

¶8. (C) Initial surveys conducted in Milan, according to Sant'Egidio, were of camps inhabited by Italian citizen Roma, whose identification documents were photographed. No fingerprints were collected in these camps.

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MoI Says Census is Only First Step  
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¶9. (C/NF) Villani has said the census is the first step of a larger plan that includes rehabilitating authorized camps and moving residents of illegal encampments to authorized locations; promoting education for children living in camps, only 40% of whom currently attend school; ensuring adequate access to health care; and enhancing security both for camp residents and those in the surrounding areas. The MoI has not announced details of any of these plans; Villani said a census of residents was the necessary first step before other plans could be worked out.

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NGOs, EU Express Concern  
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¶10. (C) Human rights NGOs, including Sant'Egidio and Opera Nomadi, the largest Italian NGO focused exclusively on Roma and Sinti, expressed mixed opinions to us about the plan and its implementation. They expressed general concerns about the discriminatory nature of the census, and said that despite referring only in vague terms to "encampments," the only targets of this survey, and in fact the only residents of such camps, are Roma. Sant'Egidio said that lack of forethought by the Interior Minister led to worrisome situations such as the data forms used briefly in Naples. However, they suggested that public and official reaction in Italy and from Brussels succeeded in limiting the scope of the census, and in particular the collection of fingerprints. Opera Nomadi Director Massimo Converso suggested to poloff that Roma in Italy face many significant challenges, including societal discrimination in housing, employment and education, and that the census was decidedly not at the top of that list.

¶11. (U) EU Justice Commissioner Jacques Barrot has questioned whether the collection of fingerprints and other census data constitutes discrimination under EU law, and said Italy's focus should be on "providing assistance to Roma, not stigmatizing them." The European Parliament passed a resolution July 10 denouncing the census as an act of discrimination on the basis of race and ethnic origin.

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Comment  
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¶12. (C/NF) Thus far, the government has only begun collecting information about camp inhabitants, which the MoI says will be used to begin programs to promote integration, education, health and employment. Critics, including domestic NGOs, opposition parties and EU institutions, however, have raised concerns that this may be the opening salvo in a campaign intended to tighten the screws on Roma in Italy. Domestic and EU pressure has already altered the program, and these

groups have given notice that they will continue to oppose other aspects of the initiative. We will be carefully watching the government's next steps to see in which direction this effort is headed.

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